

*The Thermy Campaign: Turning Up the Heat on Food Thermometer Use*

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Despite widely publicized foodborne illness outbreaks associated with undercooking foods, particularly ground meat, only 6% of consumers “sometimes” or “always” measure the temperature of burgers with a food thermometer (USDA-FSIS). This collaboration project increased knowledge of food safety issues associated with undercooking food and increased the use of food thermometers among families receiving food stamps. The purpose of this project was to provide education and tools to promote the use of food and refrigerator thermometers in the monitoring of cooking and cold storage temperatures. As preliminary training, all Family Nutrition Program (FNP) staff participated in a four-hour farm-to-table food safety workshop taught by an interdisciplinary team of faculty. The goal of the training was to increase their knowledge of everyone’s role in the food safety continuum from production to consumption. After participating in the train-the-trainer session, each FNP Agent/Assistant received a food safety resource binder with background information and teaching tools, including lesson plans and handouts based on the national “Fight BAC” and “Thermymy” campaigns developed in a pilot project, to help facilitate teaching their clients. The FNP Agents/Assistants also received food thermometers, refrigerator thermometers and food models to use in their follow-up sessions. Educational sessions with hands-on skill building activities were conducted with the target audience at commodity food distribution sites, senior centers, Head Start centers, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) offices and other locations. After participating in an educational session and completing a survey, each participant received a food thermometer, brochure and magnet. Approximately one month later, a follow-up session was conducted on proper storage of perishable foods, and each participant received a refrigerator thermometer. About 3,000 people have received food thermometers; of those, 1711 have participated in a second session and have completed a follow-up survey. Participants ranged in age from less than 20 (5%) to 70 or older (15%), with the majority (25%) from 20 to 29. About 96% of the participants reported preparing meals at home for themselves or others at least one time per week. The majority (45%) reported preparing food nine or more times weekly. About 91% reported they planned to use the food thermometer they received, and 69% answered all the knowledge questions correctly on the post-survey. At the one-month follow-up classes, educational sessions were conducted and refrigerator thermometers were distributed. About 69% answered all five food safety knowledge questions correctly on the follow-up survey, and 23% answered four out of five correctly. About 85% of the participants identified eating undercooked ground beef as “not safe at all” on the pre-survey, and 91%, on the post-survey. About 72% reported using the food thermometer at least one time in the previous month; 32% reported using the food thermometer at least five times. About 92% planned to use the refrigerator thermometer they received, and about 81% reported feeling more confident they were serving safe foods to their families when they used the thermometers. In conclusion, participants gained knowledge and made some behavior changes as a result of this food safety educational programming.